

CONTACT:

Karen Larimore Wilkinson
Marketing and Community Relations Manager
Salisbury Parks & Recreation Department
132 North Main Street
Salisbury, North Carolina 28144
Work Phone: 704-638-2113 Cell: 704-213-1050
Home Phone: 704-633-7123
Information: <http://www.salisburync.gov>
Work Email Contact: kwilk@salisburync.gov
Home Email Contact: kwilkinson2@carolina.rr.com

Salisbury City Council Receives Clean Bill of Health for Milford Hills Area

NC Division of Public Health Reports No Adverse Health Issues

Salisbury, NC – April 19, 2006 – The Salisbury City Council received a presentation representing six years of investigation by the NC Division of Public Health and contributing agencies, at their Tuesday, April 18th meeting. Beginning in the year 2000, residents of the Milford Hills area began to fear that their close proximity to an asphalt shipping and production plant may have caused increased cancer and suicide rates within their neighborhood; however the North Carolina Division of Public Health Report provided evidence, much to the contrary. City officials overwhelmingly relieved and pleased with the factual report, hope that its findings will ultimately dispel fears and allow citizens to finally relax and enjoy their lives.

Leonard Wood, Director of the Rowan County Health Department, introduced a knowledgeable panel of attending experts, including Douglas Campbell, MD, MPH, a physician and epidemiologist and the primary agent conducting the study. In addition to Dr. Campbell, present for the session were Karen Knight, Director of the Central Cancer Registry; Dr. Paul Busher, Director of the State Center for Health Statistics, and Mr. Bill Pate, Head of Health Risk Assessment for Environmental Exposures.

Campbell began his presentation by enlightening those in attendance to the mission of the NC Division of Public Health, which is to “find health risks in North Carolina” and to “communicate findings”. Campbell added, “My mission is to make sure you understand what we feel about this issue.” Attendees received a brief background from Campbell regarding concerns first raised in 2000 by a “citizen that there were more cancers in his area of Milford Hills than he was comfortable with...and later on he thought there were other health issues as well. He was concerned that these were related to environmental contaminants that originated at an asphalt facility near his neighborhood.” These concerns, led North Carolina and federal public health and environmental officials to conduct an extensive, six-year, multi-agency investigation which included an in-depth statistical investigation of the situation in Milford Hills and in Salisbury. Agencies which have contributed findings include the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS), the Federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the Central Cancer Registry (CCR) and the North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR).

In direct contrast to concerns raised, Dr. Campbell presented highlights from a 29-page detailed report, which offered findings of nothing unusual or significantly different from what would normally be expected in the typical suburban area. Presenting in tandem to a large PowerPoint projection, Dr. Campbell noted, "Cancer is a very common illness and occurs in up to 1/2 of males and 1/3 of females. It's a very scary disease, so when people learn of cancers in their neighborhood, it's a very concerning and disturbing thing to happen." Campbell elaborated further by adding that all neighborhoods have people with cancer and "if you go to any neighborhoods in this country, you'll find significant numbers of cancer." Campbell explained that cancer causing risk factors include genetics, lifestyle and the environment, adding, "It's a very complicated world that cancers exist in and all of these factors play into most cancers...it's not really possible to say I was exposed to one factor and therefore developed cancer."

Throughout the presentation, Campbell systematically reported on similar findings from the CCR, ATSDR, SCHS and DENR. Campbell reported that the CCR performed seven statistical studies of cancer over the six-year period, initially beginning with the Milford Hills area and then honing in on a 1 & 2 mile radius from the asphalt facility. Campbell noted, "In these seven studies, they found no elevated numbers of cancer" within the 1 & 2 mile radius area. In addition, twelve asphalt facilities throughout the state were tested in which Dr. Campbell noted, "Again, they showed no elevated numbers of cancer".

The ATSDR, a federal agency, which made public its findings at an open and publicly announced meeting in Salisbury, less than one month ago, offered comparable results. A similar study, conducted within a 1 mile radius of the asphalt plant, prompted Dr. Campbell to again reveal that these tests "found no elevated numbers."

Addressing a concern that had been raised with regards to suicide rates in the Milford Hills area, relative to fumes from the asphalt facility, the SCHS looked at "11 asphalt facilities throughout the state. Within a 2 mile radius, suicide rates were actually found lower to which Campbell further clarified, "To us, this suggests that proximity does not increase your risk of suicide." Additionally, Campbell addressed a concern of elevated Brain Cancer and Lymphoma rates within a two census block study area of Milford Hills from 1990-2000. Campbell noted that scientific results based on a comparison of this size are considered to be "unstable" due to a very limited amount of data based on a limited population size.

Air monitoring studies conducted by DENR offered analogous results with Campbell stating that test findings were "similar if not the same as other suburban and rural areas throughout the state." Campbell added that there was nothing of measure in the air that could be linked to cancer or suicide. In addition, Campbell reported on ground water exposure through home wells and offered that water sampling reports taken from the Milford Hills area during the 1990's showed that "none of the chemicals found in the Milford Hills area are capable of causing brain cancer, lymphoma and suicide."

In conclusion, Dr. Campbell described the Milford Hills area as "a pleasant place" and continued, "We feel that no chemicals found in the air,...water of the Milford Hills are known causes of brain cancer, lymphoma or suicide....so we feel the people there are not at risk from these chemicals or outcomes." Campbell added that the number of

cancers and suicides within the area are what he would expect to find and that “No further epidemiological studies are recommended”.

Paul Busher, joined Dr. Campbell and backed his assessment of the report findings to the City Council. Busher further addressed the ASTDR findings with regards to elevated cases of Lymphoma and Brain Cancer. Busher noted that statistical reports offer a 5% probability rate, often due simply to chance. Busher reminded those in attendance that out of the 40 cancers tested within the 2 census block testing area of Milford Hills, only two cancers, Lymphoma and Brain Cancer, were elevated. Busher noted that 2 out of 40 cancers, offered the 5% rate of probability and that Lymphoma and Brain Cancer in the Milford Hills area provided less than 1 new case of cancer per year in the ASTDR study. Busher added that “there is no reason to link these two cancers in particular to any exposures observed in the area.” Busher also elaborated that even if some cancers were elevated; these studies offer only descriptive statistics and that family history, personal behavior and the environment impact cancers and are factors that were not included in the studies. Busher finalized the report by stating, “We do not believe that there are excess health risks in the Milford Hills area.”

Mayor Susan Kluttz offered thanks to Campbell and Busher for providing the in-depth report and noted that it is “very important that the public hear what you have to say. We as a City are always concerned about the health and safety of our citizens.” Kluttz relayed that allegations had been forthcoming since the year 2000 and that the City of Salisbury depends extensively on the expertise and guidance of the County Health Department and State and Federal Agencies. Kluttz noted, “I want to make sure that the citizens, particularly the residents of this area, realize that we operate on fact and not fear and that because these allegations have continued, they have created fear in the neighborhood.” Noting that the allegations had recently received publication in a national magazine, Kluttz addressed Campbell and Busher, by stating, “We’ve never been given any indication from you, the experts, that there was a reason for these people in this neighborhood to be concerned and that’s why we wanted you to come here and explain your findings to us today... and we’re just very grateful to you for doing that.”

Leaving nothing to chance, Kluttz asked both gentlemen to verify the facts, one more time, “Am I correct in taking from the statement that you made earlier, that these residents are not at risk? Is that correct? To which both gentleman responded “yes, that is our finding”. Councilman Mark Lewis questioned further, “Is it reasonable to suggest you guys are the experts?” to which both Campbell and Busher affirmed with a nod and a spoken “yes”. Councilman Bill Burgin added in final affirmation, “We want the facts and we appreciate your expertise. We want the citizens to know that as a Council, we have been responsible in trying to identify that this neighborhood is not at risk. It’s just a normal neighborhood.”

Citizens may obtain a hard copy of the full report provided by the NC Division of Public Health, by contacting the City of Salisbury’s Administrative Offices at 217 S. Main Street. In addition, the report is available for online viewing by visiting the City of Salisbury’s website at www.salisburync.gov and clicking the link labeled Salisbury Press Releases under the heading of NEWS.